

Zikri Dilemmas: Origins, Religious Practices, and Political Constraints¹

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The Zikris (locally pronounced *zigrī*) are a minority Muslim group found exclusively among the Baloch population with the main concentration in south-western Pakistani Balochistan. Zikris have at times faced violence and political assaults from non-Zikris, and their beliefs and practices have been misrepresented. This trend has continued in recent years as Zikris have come under increasing pressure from Islamic fundamentalists. The purposes of this paper are to provide a more accurate account of the likely historical development of the Zikri faith, describe Zikri rituals and prayers, and highlight the oppressive situation Zikris face today.

1. Zikris in Balochistan

The Zikri faith arose in Makran in the late 16th century and later flourished there. No precise figures are available on the number of the Zikris because they are counted under the general title of Muslim in the census reports in Pakistan (MALIK 2002:11). Their present number may be estimated at around 600,000 to 700,000 with more than 100,000 living in Karachi, and a considerable number in interior Sindh (MOHAMMAD 2000). Besides Makran, Zikris are found in large numbers in the Mashkay and Gresha areas of Khuzdar district, throughout Awaran district and in many parts of Lasbela district (GUL KHAN NASIR 1982:233; AZAD 2003:371, 389). Some Zikris have also migrated to the Arabian Gulf peninsula where the majority live in the Sultanate of Oman.²

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- 1 This paper is primarily based on my field notes taken during various trips to Balochistan when I was collecting material about the folklore and oral traditions of the Baloch. Most of the data used here come from interviews held at Koh-i Murad and elsewhere in Turbat, Gwadar, Pasni, Ormara and Karachi in September 2005. Very sincere thanks are due to all my informants, but especially to M. Ishaq Durrazai, with whom I spent many hours discussing issues related to the Zikris, consulting his manuscripts and searching through his notes. Special thanks are also due to Profs. Adriano Rossi and Alberto Ventura of Università degli studi di Napoli, "l'Orientale" (Italy) for reading earlier drafts of this paper and making valuable comments. Needless to say, I am the only one responsible for any shortcomings and the opinions expressed here.
 - 2 BALOCH 1996:223; ABDUL GHANI BALOCH 1996:21; HOSHANG 1991:22. ABDUL GHANI BALOCH 1996:21 probably overestimates the number of Zikris at one million while HARRISON 1981:187 puts it at 500,000 to 700,000 in the early 1980s (cf. also BRESEEG 2004:77; *Library of Congress report* <http://countrystudies.us/pakistan/35.htm>). BUZDAR 1986-87:5 writes "approximately one-fourth of the Makran population are members of the Zikri community"; AHMED 1987:51 gives the same figure.

Until the first half of the 20th century Zikris were estimated to be about half of Makran's population³, and there were Zikris in almost all major towns in Makran. Owing to constant persecution and forced conversions, presently there are many towns with no Zikris at all.⁴

The Bulaida valley (40 km north of Turbat) in Kech district may be taken as an example. It had entire villages of Zikris until the early 20th century. Now, however, there is not a single Zikri family left in major towns there. The last major attack on Zikris in Bulaida took place in 1980 when an outlaw from Iranian Balochistan, Shahmurad (called Shahmuk⁵ by the Zikris), declared jihad against them. He killed many Zikris and forced others to convert to Sunni Islam until he was killed by some Zikris.⁶ A few Zikri families escaped from Bulaida and settled in the Kech valley, others migrated to the Balgitar valley, where Shahmurad pursued them and killed five more. The last remaining Zikri family from Bulaida found it hard to stay there and migrated to Turbat a few years back.⁷

A large number of Zikris also used to live in Iranian Makran, where Kaserkand, Gih and Sarbaz were their major centres (BALOCH 1996:237; cf. CURZON 1966/II:260). However, very few are to be found in that part of Balochistan today (cf. ZAND MOQADDAM 1991:322).⁸ The last major group was driven away from there when a

3 See *BDGS* VII:112, BALOCH 1996:224, and the British traveller Charles MASSON (1844:294) on the district of Kech. LORIMER (1915/I,2:2150-2151) notes Zikris "dominated the whole of Makrān up to Jāsk until 1740", and BUZDAR (1986-87:5) says that "historically, Makran has been the bastion of the Zikri sect of Islam". He believes that "the main reason behind the invasion of Makran by Naseer Khan of Kalat was to stop the spread of this new sect", while GUL KHAN NASIR (1993:60) opines that Nasir Khan's aim was to bring Makran under his domain and unite all Baloch areas into a single Baloch state. The Zikri state of Makran was consolidated under one of the last rulers of the Malik dynasty, continued with the Bulaidais in the early 17th century, and terminated with the Gichkis in the second half of the 18th century. By defeating Malik Dinar Gichki, the last Zikri ruler of Makran, Nasir Khan conquered all western Baloch territories previously occupied by the Zikri rulers (cf. POTTINGER 1816:250; *BDGS* VII:47-49; SPOONER 1989:626; GUL KHAN NASIR 1993:56ff.).

4 *BDGS* VII:121 observes that the faith was already on the decline in the early 20th century.

5 The diminutive may be used to convey a pejorative meaning (see BADALKHAN 2003:296).

6 For more information on Shahmurad, see HOSHANG 1991:41, and *Zikri issue of Makran* 1995:2; DURRAZAI 2005:110-11.

7 Interview with head of the family in Turbat, summer 2004.

8 Some Zikris are said to be found in Garmen Bet, Jugri Bet, Saidabad, Kahurburz and Kishkaur areas in western Makran but their number is reported to be very small (HOSHANG 1991:22). ZAND MOQADDAM 1991:322 also reports some Zikris in the Bahu Kalat area belonging to the Rais tribe. Saeed

certain Qazi Abdullah Sarbazi declared jihad against them in the 1930s, which resulted in a major massacre (cf. ZAND MOQADDAM 1991:252). Iranian Zikris left their homeland, abandoned their possessions, and migrated to eastern Makran where the Zikris were still strong in number (ABDUL GHANI BALOCH 1996:102; HOSHANG 1991:22). In spite of their decision to avoid conflict with the Sunni clerics, the Sunni mullahs attacked the village of Jakigwar with 100 armed men one morning in 1936, killing Shay Gulabi, a spiritual leader of the Zikris, along with six of his family members (DURRAZAI 2005:102, NORAIEE, this volume). Their homes and properties were distributed as war booty (*māl-i ḡanīmat*) (see ABDUL GHANI BALOCH 1996:103-105, 110). Abdul Ghani Baloch, whose family came from Jakigwar in Iranian Makran, writes that prior to this killing and forced migration, hundreds of other Zikris were killed from time to time in the areas of Farod, Baftan and Kishkaur by fanatic Sunnis at the instigation of mullahs (ABDUL GHANI BALOCH 1996:105; cf. DURRAZAI 2005:102-03).

The Zikris are almost exclusively speakers of Balochi.⁹ Some are found among the Brahui speaking tribes but none are from the other ethnolinguistic groups of the region, which probably indicates a local origin of this branch of Islam. For this reason, PASTNER/PASTNER 1972:235 have described Zikrism as a uniquely Baloch religion, and many Baloch nationalists and intellectuals depict it as the national religion of the Baloch, and a Zikri as the archetypal Baloch.¹⁰ Members of the Zikri sect are found in most Baloch tribes (AZAD 2003:389),¹¹ with the exception of the tribes living on the eastern sides of Kalat and Khuzdar districts (which more or less corresponds to the area of Eastern Balochi as defined by ELFENBEIN 1966, 1989:637).¹²

Saeedi informed me (Turbat, February 2006) that there are about 500 Zikris in the Garmen Bet area. His late father, Haji Karim Bakhsh Saeedi, gave them protection during attacks by a Sunni mullah.

9 Cf. KAWSAR 1968:35; DAMES 1981:340; BOSWORTH 1981:222; GUL KHAN NASIR 1982:233; and BALOCH 1996:248, n. 5.

10 See ADENAG 1999:132; GUL KHAN NASIR 1982:233; BALOCH 1987:72, and MALIK 2002:11.

11 There are Zikris from the following tribes: Rind, Rais, Mullazai, Hot, Sangurr, Kalmati, Gishkauri, Nohani, Darzadag, Mengal, Bizanjo, Mahmad Hasani, Kurd, Sajidi, Maldar, Banr, Hangara, Gorgej, Shaikh Ahmadi, Sasoli, Sumalani, Kambarani, Gurgunari, Omarani, Umrani, Kahdai, Sopakk, Syahpad, Jadgal. This list is far from being complete as my 2005 stay in Pakistan was too short to do a more exhaustive investigation. This data is based on my interviews carried out in Kech, Gwadar and Karachi (in Karachi, I met office bearers of the All Pakistan Muslim Zikri Anjuman). See also GUL KHAN NASIR 1982:233; HOSHANG 1991:23; BALOCH 1996:224; AZAD 2003:368, 389.

12 SHAH MUHAMMAD MARI 2000:397 mentions about 100 Zikris among the Bugti tribe in Sui village of Dera Bugti district, but this seems questionable, as I did not hear of any among the Bugtis during my visit to the region in 1991.

Zikris are an integral part of their tribes, enjoying equal rights and obligations. They come from all social classes – cultivators, landowners, and pastoral nomads – and there are no differences in the social or economic status of Zikri and Sunni communities. Indeed, going back a few generations virtually all Zikri and Sunni Baloch in Makran have common ancestors, and there are cases where first cousins (or sometimes even brothers and sisters) are divided along Zikri and non-Zikri lines.¹³

In cultivated areas one finds fields belonging to Zikri families adjoining those of Sunni families because many families have their ancestral lands divided among Zikri and Sunni members equally, or have constructed new cultivable lands jointly. In other cases a *kahn* (underground water channel) may be jointly owned by Sunni and Zikri shareholders. Fishing seems to be the only occupation where there is a difference between Zikris and Sunnis. No Zikri fisherman would be called *mēd*, a term reserved for Sunni Baloch professional fishermen. Rather, Zikri fishermen are called *pādī* (one who paddles to fish), or *balōč*, a term used on the coast to indicate a non-*mēd* Baloch.¹⁴

2. Fundamentals of the Zikri belief

The term Zikri¹⁵ is derived from *zīkr*, the Balochi pronunciation of Arabic *dhikr* "pronouncement, remembrance".¹⁶ *Zikr* denotes the prayers which Zikris perform in place of *ṣalāh/namāz*, the daily prayers of other Muslims.¹⁷ The reason for the name is the importance attached to the recitation of the *zīkr* of God (MALIK 2002:11; ABDUL GHANI BALOCH 1996:51). Zikris maintain that *zīkr* is obligatory for all humans because it was made compulsory on Adam (the father of mankind) and all of his descendants.

13 MASTIKHAN 1990:47; AHMED 1987:52; ABDUL GHANI BALOCH 1996:21, 104.

14 See BADALKHAN 2002:259 and 2006 for a discussion of social titles prevalent on the coast.

15 RIZVI 1965:68; HOLLISTER 1953:47; MADELUNG 1986:1231. *BDGS* VII:116, and several other later sources (cf. FIELD 1959:57), record the term "Dai" for the Zikris but I have not found the term anywhere among the Zikris. In some sources, however, the epithet *dāī* ("one who invites") is used for the Mahdi, who invites people toward the religion, thus *dāī al-Qurān* "the one who invites people toward the Quran" (cf. DURRAZAI 2003), as well as *dāī Allāh* ("the one who invites toward the path of God") (*Imām-e Zamāna* n.d.:24; DURRAZAI 2005:22ff.). The term *dāī* is also used among the Isma'ilis with the "clear meaning of a missionary, propagandist, a dignitary in the propaganda hierarchy" (IVANOW 1918:37).

16 REDAELLI's explanation (1997:43, n. 52) that "the word 'Zikri' may derive from 'zikhr' or 'sikhr'" is obviously due to an error.

17 HUGHES 1877:44; AHMED 1987:53; BALOCH 1987:72.

The Zikris are a Mahdiist group.¹⁸ The term *mahdī* literally means "the (divinely) guided one", "the directed one", "the one who is fit to guide others", "a leader". According to Islamic belief, the Mahdi is a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad who will appear at the end of time to restore the religion and cause justice to triumph (NASIR AHMAD 2003:62). Muslims will follow him and he will assume power all-over the Islamic world.¹⁹ The Shiites, especially the Twelver Imamites (the *Iṭnā ʿAṣarīya*), believe that the Mahdi is the Twelfth Imam, who did not die, but went in hiding as a child and will appear sometime before the end of the world (cf. HOLLISTER 1953:47; MADELUNG 1986:1236).

By contrast, the Zikris believe the Mahdi has already come and gone. Various theses have been put forward concerning the identity of the Mahdi of the Zikris. DURRAZAI 2003 describes four major opinions: 1) The *nūrī naẓrīya*, viz. the theory that Imam Mahdi was created from the Holy Light (Arabic *nūr* "light") though he visited the earth in a human shape to guide the people according to the teachings of the Quran, and then disappeared; 2) Sayyid Mohammad Jaunpuri, or one of his followers, was the Mahdi, who directly or indirectly introduced the doctrine in Makran; 3) The Mahdi is the 12th Imam of the Shiites; and 4) The Mahdi was Sayyid Muhammad Atakki, who was born in Attock in Punjab. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss all of these hypotheses, but I will give a brief introduction to Sayyid Muhammad Jaunpuri, because the hypothesis that he is the Mahdi is the one that has been advocated by many non-local writers (and a few Zikri writers).²⁰

18 HAMZEH'EE 1990:39 describes the Zikri as a branch of the Yaresan, also known as Ahl-i Haqq (*ahl-i ḥaqq*). However, I do not see common points here (for the Yaresan or Ahl-i Haqq see MINORSKY 1964; EDMONDS 1969; HAMZEH'EE 1990; MIR-HOSSEINI 1996; KREYENBROEK 1996). To mention but a few basic differences between these two faiths, unlike the Zikris, "the Yaresan have no church and no daily prayer" (HAMZEH'EE 1990:156). "In place of *namāz* ('daily prayers'), the Ahl-e Haqq have *niyāz* ('offering' or 'supplication'); they often refer to themselves as *niyāzi* as opposed to Muslims who are *namāzi*. Instead of mosques, they go to their own place of worship, *jamxāne*; instead of Ramadan, they hold a specific fast during the winter; and finally, instead of making the pilgrimage to Mecca, the adepts become Ḥāji by going to Solṭān's shrine in Shaykhān" (MIR-HOSSEINI 1996:125; see also KREYENBROEK 1996). Both Ahl-i Haqq and Yazidis fast only three days once a year, from the 12th to the 14th of January (MINORSKY 1964:309), and break the fast when 10 stars can be seen (EDMONDS 1969:95-96). Zikris, however, fast in the first nine days of the month of *ʿĪd al-Adḥā* and break the fast soon after the sunset.

19 IBN KHALDŪN 1958/II:156; WILLIAMS 1971:217; MADELUNG 1986; cf. WENSINCK 1927:139.

20 To cite a few, see for example, *BDGS* VII:117; FIELD 1959:60; PASTNER/PASTNER 1972:233, GUL KHAN NASIR 1982:233; QAMARUDDIN 1985:217; ŠAWKAT ALĪ n.d.:105; ARNOLD/LAWRENCE 1986:1230; BUZDAR 1986-87:5; REDAELLI 1997:110; PASTNER 1988:166, n. 2; MASTIKHAN 1990:47;

Sayyid Mohammad was born at Jaunpur in India in 847/1443. Mahdawi sources give his father's name as Abdullah and that of his mother as Bibi Amina.²¹ He proclaimed himself to be the Mahdi and made a long tour of central India, Gujarat and the Deccan. People in huge numbers assembled to listen to his sermons and "a large number of Ulama, Sufis, Sheikhs, nobles, businessmen and the soldiers became his followers" (QAMARUDDIN 1985:36). In 901/1495 Sayyid Mohammad went to Mecca where he repeated his claim to be the promised Mahdi.²² Unrecognised by Meccan *'ulamās* (ANSARI 1965:500), he returned to India and continued his mission. Seeing his popularity, Sultan Mahmud Begarha ordered him to leave Gujarat. After travelling to many places Sayyid Mohammad came to Sindh and stayed for 18 months at Thatha where he gathered a large number of followers.²³ He was again asked to leave Sindh. With 900 of his followers he moved to Afghanistan (SHAYDAI 1974:12), where several rulers joined his ranks.²⁴ He died at Farah in Afghanistan in 910/1505 after having stayed there for 29 months. In 981/1573, Shah Qasim Iraqi, the ruler of Farah, started construction of his mausoleum which was completed by his successor Yaghanah Sultan (QAMARUDDIN 1985:48). Soon it became a place of pilgrimage and Mahdawis from India, Pakistan and Afghanistan "consider it a great act of piety to pay a visit to the mausoleum" (QAMARUDDIN 1985:48). After his death many of his followers, who had accompanied him to Farah, returned to India. A few remained in Afghanistan and converted a large number of people to the Mahdawi faith (QAMARUDDIN 1985:49). Presently, a considerable number of his followers are found in India but some migrated and settled in interior Sindh following the partition of India.

It seems that the early authors who maintained that Sayyid Muhammad Jaunpuri is the Zikri Mahdi did so on the basis of information provided by non-Zikris during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and they were then followed by others. This theory was also adopted in modern times by a few Zikri writers. The great majority of Zikris, including the most influential *muršids*,²⁵ reject this thesis and emphasize that there is a considerable gap of time between the birth and death dates of Sayyid Mohammad

HOSHANG 1991:24; ABDUL GHANI BALOCH 1996:61; BALOCH 1996:224; RAGAM 2000:103-105; SHAH MUHAMMAD MARI 2000:396; MALIK 2002:11; AZAD 2003:390.

21 ASGHAR 1978:1; RIZVI 1965:75; QAMARUDDIN 1985:30.

22 ASGHAR 1978:3; cf. ANSARI 1965:499-500; MUJEEB 1967:102; AHMAD 1969:27; QAMARUDDIN 1985:35, 22.

23 RIZVI 1965:90; SHAYDAI 1974:9.

24 RIZVI 1965:92-93; QAMARUDDIN 1985:43-45; AL-BUSHAHRI 1999:474.

25 A *muršid* (also called *ustād*) is a Zikri spiritual guide (see section 4).

Jaunpuri and that transmitted by the Zikri traditions about their Mahdi (see below), indicating they were two different persons.²⁶ They say that none of their ancestors ever mentioned or had even heard of Sayyid Mohammad Jaunpuri, much less that he was their Mahdi (UMRANI BALOCH 1986:71).²⁷ And my Zikri informants constantly told me there are no relations of any nature between the Zikri and Mahdawi communities as their religious beliefs and practices are very different.

In addition to the four hypotheses mentioned above, the Zikri oral and written traditions can be posed as a fifth line of thought. While there are no precise details available, all Zikri sources record that the Mahdi was born in AH 977/1569 AD²⁸ and died in Kech (modern Turbat) in 1029/1650. They make constant mention of Shah Nimatullah Wali, the most celebrated teacher of the 15th century Iranian Sufis (CORBIN 1958:270, n. 294), who was also known as "the king of dervishes" (BROWNE 1951/III:464). Unlike his adherents in later times, Nimatullah Wali "remained a Sunni throughout his life".²⁹ He is buried at Mahan in the vicinity of Kerman.³⁰ Most influential Zikri *muršids* and the custodians of the Koh-i Murad (see section 5) trace their ancestry to a certain

26 Cf. *Ittiḥād-i nawḡawānān-i Zikrī* I & II, which are written entirely to challenge the Sayyid Mohammad Jaunpuri theory and where the issue is discussed in detail (see also *Imām-i Zamāna* n.d.:29-30). Abdul Ghani Baloch, although a staunch supporter of the Sayyid Mohammad Jaunpuri theory, underlines the differences in Mahdawi and Zikri sources and writes that there is a missing link which needs to be established before we can be certain that Sayyid Mohammad Jaunpuri is the Mahdi of the Zikris (ABDUL GHANI BALOCH 1996:94; cf. also DURRAZAI 2003:18-19, who discusses the differences and discrepancies).

27 This is confirmed by REDAELLI (1997:110, n. 129) and PASTNER 1984:304, who observe that the name of Sayyid Muhammad Jaunpuri is practically unknown among the Zikris.

28 Cf. the manuscripts *Sayl-i jahānī* and *Angabīn* 1725; UMRANI BALOCH 1986:103; HOSHANG 1991:26; DURRAZAI 2003:18; 2005:6. The author of *Ittiḥād-i nawḡawānān-i Zikrī* II:4 quotes several sources, some of them poems composed by the companions of the Mahdi and some poems composed by the second generation of his followers. All give 977/1569 as the birth date of the Mahdi. Among them is a poem composed by a companion of the Mahdi, Mir Abdullah Jangi, which records his travels, and the manuscripts *Durr-i wuḡūd* (completed in 1107/1696) by Shaikh Mohammad Durfīshan, grandson of Mir Abdullah Jangi; also *Durr-i ṣadaf* (completed in 1182/1769) by Qazi Brahem Kashani, and several others. I have consulted <http://www.islamsa.org.za/calendar/converter.htm> to convert Hijri dates to Gregorian.

29 ALGAR 1995:44; KNYSH 2000:240; POURJAVADY/WILSON 1974:55.

30 Cf. POURJAVADY/WILSON 1974, 1975; ALGAR 1995. Following the death of Shah Nimatullah Wali, his Sufi order shifted to India. It was reintroduced into Persia in the late 18th century (ALGAR 1995:44). During this whole period, "there were Sufi migrations between the Indian and Iranian Ne'matollāhī centres until the seventeenth century, when Sufism largely disappeared from Iran under Shāh Soleyman" (VAN DEN BOS 2002:56).

Sayyid Atiyatullah, also known as Chirag Hudadat/Khudadat³¹ ("given by God"). Zikri sources maintain that Chirag Hudadat was a direct descendant of Shah Nimatullah Wali (ABDUL GHANI BALOCH 1996:23; DURRAZAI 2003:97, 2005:46-65), and that he was born in Kech, but sent to Iran for religious education (Durrizai 2005:63). After completing his education he came back to Kech and became the spiritual guide of the Zikris. It is agreed that before Chirag Hudadat returned from Iran, Zikris practised a version of Sunni Islam, the only difference being that, in addition to *ṣalāt/namāz*, they also recited collective *zikr* at certain fixed hours of the day (DURRAZAI 2005:62). It was Chirag Hudadat and his sons who introduced the present form of prayers among the Zikris. Sayyid Chirag Hudadat is held in high regard among the Zikris, second only to the Mahdi himself.

Putting all the pieces together, it seems plausible to me that the Mahdi of the Zikris could have come originally as an emissary or a descendant of Shah Nimatullah Wali, and that he took refuge in Kech and continued his Sufi rituals there, which consisted mostly of the recitation of *zikr* formulas. In the course of a few decades, the Zikris got control of the chieftdom of Kech. They may have then introduced changes in the Sunni tenets and established an independent branch of Islam as the state religion of the independent kingdom of Makran (cf. fn. 3; also PASTNER 1978:163).

3. Zikri prayers and songs

All Zikri prayers are performed with bare feet, clean clothes and covered heads.³² Talking and smoking or chewing tobacco during prayers are strictly prohibited. *Zikr* prayers are performed in the *zigrāna* (lit. "house of *zikr*"), the ritually pure space for *zikr*. For individual praying, *zigrāna* is defined by either a round mat or rug, used exclusively for *zikr* or other meditation, or simply a clean cloth spread on the ground. One does not perform *zikr* while sitting on soil unless inside a *zigrāna* building, or in a place out of the reach of animals, for fear that the spot might have been polluted by the urine of an animal.

31 Cf. PASTNER 1984:305. *Čirāg* (lit. "lamp") is used to indicate something sacred and venerated. For example, when the Zikris pronounce the name of a *sayyid* they often add *čirāgēn* ("enlightened"), meaning someone with spiritual powers, e.g. Chiragen Mulla Dadkarim, Chiragen Mulla Abdulkarim, and Chiragen Mulla Yarmahmad.

32 Zikris consider it a sin for both men and women to have a bare head. The common belief is that angels abandon a bareheaded person. Similarly, it is a sin to shave one's beard which would exclude a person from the ranks of the faithful. In modern times, however, youths often stay clean-shaven and bareheaded and cover their heads only for prayers.

The *zigrānas* where group prayers are performed are generally thatched houses, and every settlement has separate ones for men and women. Traditionally, *zigrānas* were built in the same style as ordinary domestic rooms, though bigger to hold large numbers of people. *Zigrānas* for men are usually built with a large open ground in front. This space is used for religious congregations, to prepare and distribute *hayrāt*³³, to hold *čawgān* gatherings (see 3.2), to receive visiting *sayyids* or *muršids*,³⁴ and for other collective purposes. *Zigrānas* for women are often built in the village centre to facilitate the movement of women to and from the *zigrāna*. *Zigrānas* do not have a *mihrāb* (a niche marking the direction of prayer) as the indication of a direction has no meaning to the Zikris. They argue that God is everywhere, so one does not need to face a particular direction to communicate with God.³⁵ *Zigrānas* do not have a minaret either.³⁶ In recent years, however, as a consequence of criticism from Sunnis, many *zigrānas* are built facing east³⁷ and in the style of mosques though without pulpits (MALIK 2002:12). In nomadic encampments circles of stones (one each for men and women) are erected to mark the *zigrāna* and to keep it clean and out of the reach of animals.

In the *zigrānas* copies of the Quran are always present on shelves or in niches. They are usually wrapped in clean costly cloth and opened only when one wants to recite from them. Most Zikris kiss or touch the Quran with their hands and then kiss their hands or

33 *Hayrāt* or *hayrātay warag* is collective charity food: it comes from a collection of cash or food among the villagers if it is organized at village level, but from the general public if it is at the Koh-i Murad (see section 5). This is done prior to the event and the food is cooked by men. Women and children are served separately, and after the performers of a ceremony. The consumption of this food is highly meritorious and everyone is supposed to eat some, contribute to it financially, and/or participate in its preparation.

34 Nowadays *muršids* are mostly hosted by their *murīds* (cf. section 4), and the village people go to visit them there. Until a few decades ago, people could not afford houses with more than one room, so visiting *muršids* would stay either in the settlement's guest house, which is generally built adjacent to the men's *zigrāna*, or in a tent erected for them in front of the *zigrāna*.

35 To substantiate this view, Zikri scholars often cite the Quranic verses, Sura 2:115: "To Allāh belong the East and the West: wherever you turn, there is the presence of Allāh", and Sura 50:16 "We [God] are nearer to him [the human being] than his jugular vein" (interview with Mulla Mazar Umrani, Koh-i Murad, July 1993). Similarly, some Sufi schools also define God as "a circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere" (ODAL 2002:240; AHMED 2002:395). NICOLINI 2004:16 is inaccurate in saying that the Zikris pray facing "the Koh-e-Murad, 'the Pure-Light'" (note also that Koh-i Murad means "the hill of [fulfilling] desires", see section 5.).

36 Note that early mosques had neither a *mihrāb* nor a minaret (WOODBERRY 1996:179).

37 As Mecca is to the west from Pakistan, mosques are built facing east and Zikris are obviously imitating mosques.

press the Quran against their eyes (*Qurānay dast u dēm kanag*) as a sign of veneration after each prayer. Zikris consider the Quran to be the last revelation from God (ABDUL GHANI BALOCH 1996:59) and all copies of the Quran which are found in *zigrānas* are printed by Sunni Muslim printing presses in major Pakistan cities. Reports that the Zikris have their own holy book are without foundation.³⁸

Zikris do not make use of drugs in any of their religious services, nor do these sessions usually lead to a state of trance. However, in individual meditations, when men spend most of a night reciting silent *zīkr*, often standing for hours, sometimes even on one foot, some enter into a state of trance. Many claim to have seen visions and met with God, the Mahdi, angels, *muršids*, deceased parents or elders, and so on. No musical instruments are employed in the performance of Zikri religious singing.

In addition to the religious songs and prayers discussed below, Zikris have a number of other prayers and invocations for various occasions.³⁹ For example, there is a bedtime prayer: *waspīn pa dast-i rāst, pād kāin pa nām-i pāk, sar pa zamīn u dil pa hudā, byāit šarrēnān, birawit gandagēnān* ("I sleep with the right hand, get up with the name of God [on my tongue], my head [rested] on the earth, and my heart is turned to God: come, good things, and go away, bad things!"). When passing by a graveyard, they recite: *salām alayk šahr-i hāmōš, dunyā pirāmōš, šumā šutag-it mā kāhān* ("Greetings to you, [inhabitants of the] city of silence, carefree about the world, you have gone [already], we will come [as well]"). On hearing the news of a death one should recite: *gul biričāt, ā šutag may rāh amā int; wāja hudā āharā watī rahmattānī čērā jāga bidyāt* ("May flowers shower, s/he has left, ours is the same path; God may give him/her a place under His generousities!"). Similarly, when beginning to eat or drink something they recite the common Islamic Arabic formula *b-ism-illāh ar-rahmān ar-*

38 Some non-local writers make mention of a certain *Furqān* as the sacred book of the Zikris (AL-BUSHAHRI 1999:473) but no one seems to have seen such a book. Some other non-local sources mention another book, called *Burhān*, which their Mahdi supposedly found in Kech in a tree, known as *barray kahūr* (Cook, quoted in FIELD 1959:61). ABDUL GHANI BALOCH 1996:117 comments on this misinformation saying that if the *Burhān* were really their sacred book, then why has no one ever seen a copy of it or even heard of it? He adds that if the alleged holy book were discovered in the *barray kahūr*, then why is there no shrine, or any other sign to show the importance of the tree to the Zikris? Zikris make no claim of having any holy book other than the Quran.

39 I am grateful to Miyya Mazar (now in his late 60s), who recited these prayers for me in Hironk (September 2005). In what follows, Arabic formulas are given in the way they are used by the Zikris, and translated as understood by them; the formulas do not necessarily conform to the rules of Arabic grammar.

rahīm, but when they finish eating they wash their hands, wipe the mouth with wet hands, and recite: *šugrān-i tām u salāmattēn dīnn u īmmān, manī jānā hilār u ākirattā hisābān-iš kam kan* ("Thanks [to God] for the food and for the peaceful religion and faith; please [O God] make it lawful to my body and lessen the reckoning [of the food eaten] on the Day of Judgement"). Apart from the Arabic formulas, these and many other Zikri prayers are in Balochi, which makes the Balochi language an important part of the Zikri faith and religious practices.

3.1 Daily prayers: *zīkr*

Daily prayers are called *zīkr* (pronounced as *zigr*), of which there are a number of types. They differ in duration, whether or not they involve bowing (*rukūʿ*) and prostration (*saʿjda*), and whether they are performed individually or in groups. All *zīkr* should be performed only in a state of ritual purity after proper ablutions (*dast-u-dēm girag*, lit. "taking hand and face", denoting full ablution among the Zikris).⁴⁰

There are five daily *zīkrs*.⁴¹ Three are obligatory and are performed out loud (*zīkr-i ʿālī*) in groups.⁴² The other two are performed silently (*zīkr-i xafī / qalbī*) by individuals on their own. The silent *zīkrs* are performed by more devoted (and generally older) persons. Women perform only the three loud *zīkrs*.⁴³

40 Proper ablutions are necessary for all Zikri prayers, though the prescription is less strict than among the Sunnis. If water is not available at the time of *zīkr*, however, then prayers are postponed until water is procured. I have not heard of Zikris practising *tayammum* (ablution with earth or sand, cf. WENSINCK 2000) as do other Muslims. Observing Zikris generally take a ritual bath on Thursdays because Friday (which begins at the sunset of Thursday) is considered to be an auspicious night (*nēkēn šap*) for which one should be in a state of purity. The majority of Zikris have special clothes (*zigray gud*), preferably white, which they wear only for *zīkr*. The pattern is to make ablutions or bathe, put on these clothes, say the prayers, then remove the clothes and hang them in a high place, and put on the day-to-day clothes.

41 Some sources report six daily prayers (*BDGS* VII:119-20; BOSWORTH 1981:222; QAMARUDDIN 1985:221; AHMED 2002:385, 388). According to *BDGS* VII:119, this *zīkr* takes place at home and consists of repeating *lā ilāh illā Allāh* thirteen times before dawn. The Zikri manuscript *Angabīn* also mentions six daily *zīkrs*, one of which is at sunrise.

42 It is worth mentioning that the Shiites of "Ithnā ʿAsharīya usually pray three times daily rather than five" (HOLLISTER 1953:50). The duration of loud *zīkrs* differs from group to group and region to region. They used to be sung as melodiously as possible, so that in some regions, or in the prayer of some groups, their duration doubles. In order to let participants engage in daily activities loud *zīkrs* are nowadays performed less melodiously and finished in less time than formerly.

43 Some more pious and older women also pray *Nēmhangāmay zīkr* at home.

The daily *zīkr* have Balochi names. 1) *Gwarbāmay* ("of early dawn") is a loud *zīkr* that also includes silent recitation of Quranic verses. It is performed in groups beginning at 4:30 to 5:00 a.m., lasts about an hour, and includes *rukū'* and *saĵda*. 2) *Nēmročay* ("of mid-day") is a loud *zīkr* that also has silent formulas and is performed in groups at about 2 p.m., and lasts about half an hour. 3) *Rōčzarday* (lit. "of the yellowing of the sun", i.e. sunset) is a silent *zīkr* that is performed by individuals. It lasts about half an hour and includes *rukū'* and *saĵda*. 4) *Saršapay* ("of early night") is performed collectively at about 8 p.m. *Saršapay* and *Nēmročay* are thanksgiving *zīkr*s performed after the two main meals and are considered a must for all believers. 5) *Nēmhangāmay* ("of midnight") is a silent *zīkr* performed individually anytime after midnight. It is the longest *zīkr* and is also called *tahaĵĵuday zīkr* (from the Arabic term *tahaĵĵud* "a prayer said after mid-night").⁴⁴ In *Nēmhangāmay* the expression *lā ilāh illā Allāh* ("there is no God but Allāh") is repeated thousands of times (followed by verses of the Quran) with the help of the rosary and on the completion of each 100, a *rukū'* and *saĵda* is performed (*BDGS* VII:119-20).⁴⁵ This *zīkr* is performed mainly by older men, most of whom perform it until others come to the *zigrāna* for the early dawn *zīkr*. *Nēmhangāmay* is performed both in sitting and standing positions. Some devoted people perform it standing on one leg for hours.

Table 1. Daily <i>zīkr</i> s			
name	time (approx.)	type of <i>zīkr</i>	form
<i>Gwarbāmay</i>	4:30 or 5:00 a.m.	<i>zīkr-i šaš tasbīḥ</i>	in groups
<i>Nēmročay</i>	2 p.m.	<i>zīkr-i čār tasbīḥ</i>	in groups
<i>Rōčzarday</i>	sunset	<i>zīkr-i dah tasbīḥ</i>	individually
<i>Saršapay</i>	8 p.m.	<i>zīkr-i čār tasbīḥ</i>	in groups
<i>Nēmhangāmay</i>	after midnight	<i>zīkr-i dah tasbīḥ</i>	individually

44 To show the high merits of this *zīkr*, Mahmad Baksh Gangozar (at Kallag-Sami, Sept. 2005) cited a *ḥadīṯ* which I reproduce here from Al-Ghazzali. It says: "The Prophet said: O Abu Hurairah, the virtues which you do will be weighed on the Resurrection Day, but the attestation of 'There is no deity but God' [*lā ilāh illa Allāh*] will not be weighed, because if it is weighed in a scale and the seven heavens and seven earths and what is in them are both placed in another scale, the scale of 'There is no deity but God' will be heavier" (in FAZAL-UL-KARIM 1963/I:290).

45 Miyya Mazar at Hironk marked the importance of this *zīkr* by reciting the following verse: *har šap azār u yak buwān / dah šušdahay zigrā buwān* "read every night one thousand and one times [*lā ilāh illā Allāh*] / read the *zīkr* of ten prostrations" (interview Sept. 2005).

It is possible to perform the group *zikrs* individually if a person faces time restrictions, physical limitations, or the absence of a *zigrāna* – during a journey for example. In such cases, the *zikr* is said silently. All the formulas and Quranic verses are repeated in sequence without skipping any elements.

However, it is far more meritorious, and almost obligatory, to perform *zikrs* collectively (*bā-jamāit*) whenever possible. During the *zikr* those praying sit cross-legged with hands crossed below the navel or resting on the knees. Most Zikris turn their face toward the earth and hardly cast a glance at those sitting around them. It is considered sinful to shake the head, legs or other parts of the body during *zikr*. More devoted people may hang a part of their turban or head scarf in front of their faces to avoid watching others and being distracted from the *zikr*.

The *zikr* is begun by the *lāi* (the person who leads the repetition of *lā ilāh illā Allāh*) and the *duāi* (who recites Quranic verses).⁴⁶ Participants can join at any point but all must stay until the end. When performing the three vocal *zikrs*, people sit in lines facing each other: those sitting on the right side of the *lāi*, along with the *lāi*, form one chanting group, and those sitting on the left side form another chanting group along with the *duāi*.⁴⁷ Each group repeats loudly the *zikr* formula in turn. In the two silent *zikrs* people sit independently and pray *zikr* individually.

Each fixed formula in a *zikr* is repeated for a precise number of times before passing to another formula. For example, in one *zikr* a group sings: *ḥasbī rabbī ʾjall Allā, māfī qalbī ḡayr Allā, lā ilāh illā Allāh* ("God is enough to help me, God is great, I renounce all that is in my heart except God"). The second group repeats the same formula. This goes on for a set number of times. At the conclusion, the *lāi* leads all participants in a collective repetition of the formula *lā ilāh illā Allāh* (the *lāi* chants *lā ilāh*, and others respond *illā Allāh*) for a fixed number of times – 13 for *Nēmročay* and *Saršapay*, and 15 for *Gwarbāmay*.

The *duāi* usually sits on the left side of the *lāi* and reads Quranic verses after each formula before a new one is begun. When the Quranic verse is finished, all worshippers

46 Each village or settlement has one *lāi* and one *duāi*. They are generally elderly people who are always present during *zikr*. The *lāi* is only replaced in the case of an illness while a *duāi* is sometimes substituted when a *sayyid* or a more learned person on the Quran (a mullah) is present.

47 During important religious festivals people attend the three loud *zikrs* in large numbers. They form several lines, or circles, facing the centre. The *lāi* and the *duāi* sit in the centre of the first row.

conclude by saying *āmīn* and rubbing their cupped hands on their faces. After this, another *zīkr* formula is repeated, such as *Allā hū, Allā hū, lays al-hādī illā hū* ("He is Allāh, He is Allāh, there is no guide but Him"), or *Allā hū, Allā hū, lays al-munǧī illā hū* ("He is Allāh, He is Allāh, there is no saviour but Him"), or *ǧall Allā ǧall ʿall, mālikinā, rabb-i dāim o bāqī, lā yafanā*⁴⁸ ("Great is our Allāh, Great is our Lord, He will remain forever, never will He end"). Each formula ends in the same way until all the formulas are repeated, which takes from half an hour to one hour. Then all the participants read silently some Quranic verses and religious formulas, some in Persian others in Balochi,⁴⁹ and the *zīkr* session finishes when the *lāī* addresses *salām* to the participants, who in turn respond and exchange *salāms* among themselves.

3.2 Religious songs: *čawgān/sipat, bayt, sadā*

Besides the daily *zīkr*, Zikris sing various types of religious songs (all considered prayers) in chorus or as duets. It is not obligatory but highly meritorious to perform them.

Čawgān / sipat

Čawgān, also called *sipat* (Balochi pronunciation of the Arabic word *ṣifat* "praise"), are songs in praise of God, the Prophet Muhammad, the Mahdi, religious virtues, the Koh-i Murad, or the town of Turbat (which is near the Koh-i Murad and the tombs of early Zikri spiritual guides). These songs contain prayers and also address other religious themes.⁵⁰ *Čawgān* are accompanied by slow step-movements (a sort of dance)⁵¹

48 Cook (cited in FIELD 1959:61) misquotes this *zīkr* formula as "Challar, Challar Ma likna, Vajanama yad kuni".

49 For complete *zīkr* prayers with Urdu translations see *Tafsīr-i kabīr* (with explanations); SHIHZADA n.d.; DURRAZAI 2004; NURI 1976.

50 Some authors, such as the *BDGS* VII:120, QAMARUDDIN 1985:224, AHMED 2002:393-94, describe another type of collective songs, called *kištī*, about which I could not gather any information. I have since learnt that *kištī* and *čawgān* are the same though the former term is not a common one. QAMARUDDIN's description (1985:224-25) of the "kishti" contains no grain of truth. The authors of *BDGS* VII are more accurate in most details except for some misinformation. ABDUL GHANI BALOCH 1996:118-19 rightly criticises the British authors for having reproduced what the Sunni mullahs had written or recounted to them – the same is also true for many non-Baloch writers today.

51 My Zikri informants objected to the use of the term "dance" for *čawgān*, emphasising that it is a prayer and not entertainment. However, I was unable to find a better term to describe what a *čawgān* looks like. I apologise for this and wish to stress that I am using the term to define the performance style of the *čawgān* and not with reference to the literal meaning or intent of the term "dance".

See the Appendix for photos.

performed by men standing in a circle. As far as I know, women do not perform *čawgān* even among themselves except for rare occasions when they sing *čawgān* phrases in the female *zigrāna* in a seated position. However, as Zikris do not observe female seclusion, women are present as spectators at the men's performances. Only in nomadic groups, when the *čawgān* is organized for close family members or for the families of the encampment, do women and children join the *čawgān*.

Čawgāns are performed at all important religious festivals: on the 27th of Ramadan, *Šab-i barāt* (i.e. the 15th of *Šābān*, the eighth month in the Islamic calendar), during and after the *ʿĪd al-Adḥā*, and so on. They may also be held when the 14th of the lunar month falls on a Friday (*čārdah u juma*),⁵² after summer harvests,⁵³ and to celebrate wedding or circumcision ceremonies, and even the birth of a son in some well-off religious families.

The performances are led by a woman soloist, called *šāir* (lit. "poet", here used in figurative sense). *Šāirs* are married women with families, and they are helped generously by the community when *čawgān* sessions are organized at village levels. A *šāir* never asks for any payment but the organizers give her gifts of cash and local produce. On the other hand, *šāirs* will not accept any monetary recompense when they perform at the Koh-i Murad.

Performing *čawgān* is strenuous for the *šāir* and for the chorus, who must respond at the top of their voices, keep in time to the steps, and follow the increasing speed of the performance song after song until they are exhausted. The *šāir* sings one verse, and the chorus, surrounding her in a big circle, respond in the refrain.⁵⁴ In the beginning of a *čawgān* session, a man leads the singing, and when the gathering grows the female *šāir* enters and continues singing until daybreak without pause, except to drink water or tea provided by a female assistant who is constantly at her side.

52 This night, which is illuminated by the moon until dawn, is considered auspicious by the Zikris. Special prayer sessions are also organized in this occasion.

53 In Kech district *čawgān* performances are organized yearly in villages with a considerable number of Zikris after date harvests (*āmēnay ēraht*), which is also the season of the rice harvest. Money and food are collected for the occasion and public announcements invite people from neighbouring villages. Usually such sessions begin in September and go on for several consecutive Fridays when each village organizes a feast in turn. In modern times, with better transportation, *čawgān* performers may attend in large numbers from as far away as 200 to 300 km.

54 AHMED 2002:398 incorrectly writes that in the *čawgān* performance the woman singer stays inside a hut, which is surrounded by men who respond to her singing.

Each *čawgān* session begins with longer verses and in a low register. The lines become shorter, the steps faster, and the voice louder with every change of verse. This leads to a climax and then the cycle repeats with another type of *čawgān*. Each type is sung for about half an hour before it is changed to another. The length of a session depends on the number of performers and the occasion of the performance. The larger the gathering, the longer is the session.

The *šāir* guides the speed of the steps and intensity of the sung responses by modulating her voice. There is no break between different *čawgāns*, which usually continue until daybreak. The wordings of the last *čawgān* are usually: *mōminānī šap guzišt* ("the night of the believers has passed") and the chorus rejoins: *šap pa ibādat guzišt* ("the night has passed in praying").

However, if the session is organized on a small scale without a proper *šāir*, and with a small circle of performers, it usually ends just before the early dawn *zīkr* at about 5 a.m. In the case of big gatherings it continues until daybreak.

A *čawgān* performance ends with a collective recitation of the formula *lā ilāh illā Allāh* 100 times in a standing position with hands crossed below the navel.⁵⁵ It is followed by the recitation of some Quranic verses by a *duāī*.⁵⁶ Then, the performers rub their faces with their open hands saying *āmīn*, and wish God's mercy to one another. This is followed by the distribution and consumption of *hayrāt*.⁵⁷

There are three types of *čawgāns* defined by the movements and the length of lines sung. 1) In the *čarragī* ("turning") the worshippers turn right-front-left-front-right. They face those on either side of themselves and join their hands as if clapping when they return to face the circle midway through the sung line.⁵⁸ 2) In the *raw-u-āī* ("the go-

55 An aged person with religious authority, most often the *lāī*, leads such prayers. All those present respond with *lā ilāh illā Allāh*. While the response is always the same, the words said by the *lāī* change, e.g. *haqq-en* ("He is right"), *barhaq* ("just"), *dāim* ("eternal"), *kāim* ("forever in force"), *may zīkr* ("our prayer"), *may pigr* ("our meditation"), and so on. The *lāī* keeps count on a rosary.

56 This *duāī* is usually the same person who is the *duāī* in *zīkr* sessions, but if a *sayyid* is present, he takes the role.

57 With the termination of the *čawgān* session, the female *šāir* and her female assistant go to the female area and eat the *hayrāt* food with the other women.

58 This *čawgān* is very similar to the Balochi traditional dance called *čāp*, *suhbat* or *drīs* in different dialect areas of Balochistan (for Balochi dances, see BADALKHAN 2000:776-79). The major

and-come") the worshippers step forward and backward, bending when they go forward and then return to their original positions. 3) In *ǧahl-u burzī* ("the down-and-up") the worshippers stand in one place and bend down and straighten up, rhythmically following the words. In all *čawgāns* the performers move very slowly to their right.

Čawgān is one of the richest bodies of Zikri songs, and almost all of them are in Balochi, or in a mixture of Balochi and Arabic or Persian. There are hundreds of *čawgān* songs current among the Zikris. A few are reproduced here to give an idea of their content. In one of the *raw-u-āī čawgāns*, the *šāir* sings: *ḥasbī rabbī ǧall Allā, mārā madat bū yā Allā* ("Enough is to me my Glorious God, help us O God"), and the chorus (*ǧawābī*) responds: *mārā madat bū yā Allā, lā ilāh illā Allāh* ("Help us O God, there is no god but Allah"). In another *čawgān*, the *šāir* chants: *ḥasbī rabbī kirdigār, dāim ast int barkarār* ("Enough is to me my Lord, the Creator, He will exist forever"), and the chorus rejoins: *dāim ast int barkarār, lā ilāh illā Allāh* ("He will exist forever, there is no god but Allah"). Another one goes: *subhān nūray ǧall Allā* ("Praise be to the splendour God's Light"), and the chorus rejoins: *mārā madat bū yā Allā* ("Help us O God"). In one of the shortest and fastest *čawgāns*, the *šāir* chants: *yā hū* ("O He", i.e., God), and the chorus responds: *Allā hū* ("Allah is present"). Another one says: *yād-i hādī* ("Remember the Guiding One", i.e., God), and the chorus responds: *yād-i mahdī* ("Remember the Mahdi").⁵⁹

A good *šāir* often improvises by replacing the main line with lines with the same cadence and the same or a similar number of syllables. For example, in a *čawgān* session which I recorded at the Koh-i Murad in September 2005, the *šāir* sang the first line as: *Allā hī Allā* ("Always recite the name of Allah"), and the respondents' line was: *ǧī nām-i Allā* ("Yes to the name of Allah"). The *šāir* then went on with variations of the line, such as: *Allā madat bū* ("God, help me"); *manī pušt u panah bū* ("be my support and protection"); *mahšaray rōčā* ("On the day of Resurrection"); *bū manā dazgār* ("be the holder of my hand"); *pa Muhmaday nāmā* ("in the name of Muhammad"); *man gunahgār-ān* ("I am a sinner"); *taī rahmatān bāz-en* ("your generousities are great"); *man umetwār-ān* ("I am hopeful"); *Allā hī Allā*, and so on. The performers repeat the refrain and keep up with the bodily movements.

difference is that in a *čawgān* the words are more important than the movements. Also, a Balochi dance is accompanied by music and performed with fast steps, while a *čawgān* is performed without musical accompaniment and even the faster parts are always still slower than dance.

59 As these *čawgāns* are sung rapidly with fast moving steps, the listener gets the impression that the *šāir* and the chorus are simply repeating *hādī* and *mahdī*.

All *čawgān* songs are anonymous and of very old date. It is believed they were composed by Zikri scholars during the time of Chirag Hudadat⁶⁰ in the 17th century, when he replaced traditional Balochi singing and dancing on festive days to give a religious colour to all events of daily life.

The only *čawgān* composed at a later date that I am aware of is the following one. During the late 1970s or early 1980s, it was brought to the notice of the legendary *šāir* Ganjan⁶¹ that some Sunni Baloch were criticising the Zikris for having a woman inside a circle, which was considered against Baloch values. Ganjan is said to have composed this *čawgān*: *kuprā dilā mayārit ki Ganjān brātānī gwahār int* ("do not bring sinful thoughts to your minds, since Ganjan is the sister of brothers"), and the *jawābīs* rejoined: *Ganjān brātānī gwahār int, Ganjān Mahdīay mayār int* ("Ganjan is the sister of brothers, Ganjan is under the Mahdi's protection"). As this *čawgān* carried a personal message, it was abandoned after Ganjan's death in the early 1980s.

One needs a long training to become a *šāir* competent to sing for large gatherings such as those at Koh-i Murad or those organized after summer harvests when people come from long distances to participate. Besides having a good voice a *šāir* must be able to lead several hundred performers without microphones and loudspeakers, and have a rich repertoire as well as the ability to change song after song to shorter lines and faster steps. She also needs a fine sense of rhythm to lead the performers' movements by the cadence of her voice, the stresses she places upon syllables, and so on. There are presently only two or three *šāirs* with all these qualities. Top among them is Duri (now in her 60s), who is invited for all big gatherings in Balochistan and Sindh.

Bayt and sadā songs

Both *bayt* (religious poems composed in couplets or quatrains with a refrain) and *sadā* (religious couplets) are sung in dialogue form. While *bayts* have fixed texts, and are memorised as accurately as possible, both *sadā* and *čawgān* are subject to improvisation, and a good *šāir* improvises the line many times over the course of 20 minutes to half an hour before shifting to another song.

⁶⁰ See p. 300.

⁶¹ Ganjan was bestowed with a hypnotic voice and a great command of *čawgān* singing techniques. Some people recount hearing her at a distance of 10 km in early dawn *čawgāns*. She led large circles of many hundred men, controlling and commanding like an expert music director or a military commander in a passing-out parade.

Both *bayt* and *sadā* are usually sung by men but women may also lead *sadā* singing sessions. A *bayt* singer is called *baytwān*. There is no special term for a *sadā* singer but he or she is addressed as *šāir* during the performance. A lead *sadā* singer can be any person with a sweet voice and a rich repertoire.⁶²

Sadā are mostly in Balochi. They are similar to *čawgān*, the only difference is that the singing groups are seated. The *šāir* sings the first line, for instance: *yā karīm u zoljalāl u pāk u bē-aybēn hudā* ("O merciful, glorious, pure and faultless God") and the chorus responds: *mā gunahgār-ān gunāhān, taw bibakšay mihrabān* ("We sinfully commit sins, forgive us, O Merciful!"). Another *sadā* runs *mā gulēn zigray mayār-ān, mā nūray dīdāray galāh-ān* ("We take refuge in the flowery *zīkr*, and are full of enthusiasm [in the hope of] seeing the light [i.e., the Mahdi]"); and the respondents rejoin: *zigr bahištī tuhpa et, u wājahā dāt mōminānān* ("*Zīkr* is a gift of paradise that the Lord has given to true believers").

Bayt are sung as duets, each person sings a couplet or a quatrain, then those present in the gathering join in the refrain. *Bayts* are almost always in Persian. Most were composed in the 17th and 18th centuries, and I have not heard of any *bayts* composed in modern times. They are known to the people by their refrains, and the audience often asks singers to sing this or that *bayt*, for instance: *wašš bugō lā ilāh illā Allāh* ("sing sweetly, 'there is no god but Allāh'"), etc.

Most *bayts* have been written down in manuscripts and are copied and distributed as such. Some elderly men have memorised hundreds of *bayts* and sing them in duets on important religious nights. I was told of such a *mīyyā*,⁶³ named Husain, who competes in singing *bayts* with other *mīyyās* of his village during the nine or ten nights before the *ʿĪd al-Adhā*, never repeating a *bayt*.⁶⁴

62 A woman may also sing a *sadā* as soloist if she has a good voice and a rich repertoire as well as the capability to improvise. The chorus is usually men when it is organized for men, and women when it is for women though women may attend performances of men, sitting in the back rows and joining the singers in the refrain. However, men do not enter the female *zigrāna* when women are praying *zīkr* or singing devotional songs.

63 Among the Zikris other than *muršids/sayyids*, three levels of religious knowledge are distinguished, viz. the mullahs (who can read the Quran and have a certain amount of religious knowledge), the *mīyyās* (illiterate mystics with less formal knowledge, but a considerable degree of devotion to religion), and *āmī* (illiterate commoners).

64 Interview at Koh-i Murad, Sept. 2005.

4. The *muršid/murīd* relationship, and the initiation of children

A particularly important element in the Zikri belief is the institution of *sayyidship*, by which every Zikri believer is to have a *sayyid* (someone who claims descent from the Prophet Muḥammad through Ali and Fatima) as his or her lifelong *ustād* or *muršid* (spiritual guide). The *muršid* conveys the *tawba* (*tawba dayag* "to give an oath of repentance"), i.e. he makes the children take a vow to the Quran and to God to live as a Muslim following the rules of the Quran.⁶⁵ This ritual functions as a rite of passage from childhood to maturity, and is the foundation of a lifelong relationship between the child as the *murīd* (disciple) and his or her *muršid* or *dastay ustād* (the *sayyid* through whom one has taken the oath).

When a child reaches the age of maturity (usually between 7 and 13), he or she is taken to the *muršid* of the family. If the parents have different *muršids*, the children are often divided between the two, but the division usually favours the *muršid* of the father. The child is seated in front of the *muršid*, who holds his/her right hand in his right hand and recites some Quranic verses, which the child is asked to repeat with the *muršid*. Then he reads some formulas, which are in a mixed language of Persian and Balochi, listing a number of good and bad deeds. The child is then asked to take an oath that he or she will follow good deeds and abstain from bad deeds. With this he/she becomes a full member of the Zikri community. After the ceremony, the parents give an offering to the *muršid* and make some *hayrāt*. From this day on, the children are responsible for all their deeds and words, which are noted down by the two angels who accompany a person all the time. When grown up, a *murīd* will be expected to offer alms to his/her *dastay ustād* who, on his part, is supposed to bless his *murīds* and pray for them.

The importance of the *tawba* rite and of the institution of *muršid* for Zikris can hardly be overestimated. The famous 18th century Zikri poet and religious authority Qazi Brahem Kashani said: *nēst tarā amal tā ki taw tawba na kunī*⁶⁶ ("you have no meritorious deeds [i.e., your good deeds are not counted as such] if you do not make the *tawba*"). The Zikris often say *bē-tawbahā rāh nēst* ("there is no way [of salvation] for someone without *tawba*"). A *bē-ustād* ("someone without a spiritual guide") has no

65 The Zikri concept of *tawba* is basically the same as in Sufism, where *tawba* is "the first station on the Path, or rather its very beginning", which "means to turn away from sins, to abjure every worldly concern" (SCHIMMEL 1975:109).

66 Cited in DURRAZAI 2005:116. Durrazai deplores that younger generations do not perform the *tawba* confession, which is, in his opinion, a great setback to the Zikri faith.

means to reach God.⁶⁷ The *muršid* is considered to be the "perfect guide" (*ustād-i kāmīl*), who leads the *murīd* to the true path of God. A Zikri *muršid* is like a Sufi sheikh who works "for the purpose of opening the eyes of his disciples" (SCHIMMEL 1975:101; cf. also BOSWORTH et al. 1993b:631).⁶⁸

The relationship between the *muršid* and his *murīds* is often compared to that of a father and his children⁶⁹ – as a father takes material care of his children, so a *muršid* does spiritually. *Murīds* expect spiritual guidance from their *muršids* and hope for heavenly recompense for their services while *muršids* are totally dependent on the alms and contributions of their *murīds*. They visit their *murīds* once or twice a year and receive offerings, called *pinṛag* (alms), and *dahyakk* ("one tenth" [of the savings and harvest and one fortieth of the livestock]).⁷⁰ If a *muršid*, for reasons of health or other engagements, cannot visit his *murīds* during the year, a representative is sent to collect *dahyakk* and *pinṛag*, or a local agent collects it and delivers it to the *muršid* in his home town. The general concept is that the *muršid* and his *murīds* should not meet too often as this will decrease the attachment and veneration in the *murīd*'s heart. To

67 This applies also to Sufism (cf. SCHIMMEL 1975:100ff.; REXHEB 1984:140; NANDA/TALIB 1992:127, 129ff.) and other Muslim groups. The Sufis believe that "when someone has no sheikh, Satan becomes his sheikh", and that "whoever travels without a guide / needs two hundred years for a two days journey" (SCHIMMEL 1975:103). MACEOIN (1992:154), for example, writes "it is of the very essence of Shī'ism that knowledge of God cannot be obtained without knowledge of the Prophet and that this, in turn, is unattainable without knowledge of a living Imām: 'he who dies without an Imām, it is as if he has died in the days of barbarism before Islam'". A somewhat similar tradition also exists among the Ahl-i Haqq (see MINORSKY 1964:309), among the Yazidis and among the Turkish and Albanian Bektashi Sufis, who believe that "without the guidance of a *murshid* one cannot proceed to achieve perfection, and that the knowledge of God cannot be taught with books alone" (REXHEB 1984:160).

68 On the relationship between the Sufi sheikh and his *murīd*, NANDA/TALIB 1992:129 write: "The love of the Shaikh is an endless longing that cumulates with ever increasing intensity. Such an undiminishing love bestows on the murid, as it endures, the enhanced spiritual endowments".

69 Note that the bondage of the *murīd* to the *pīr* in the Indian Sufi discourse "is expressed literally by the term *ghulami* (enslavement)", and it is through the unconditional and unqualified respect for the *pīr* that the *murīd* expresses his complete obedience and devotion (NANDA/TALIB 1992:133; see also BOSWORTH et al. 1993a).

70 *Murīds* give the *dahyakk* to their *dastay ustād* while anyone may give *pinṛag* (which may be any amount of money) to any visiting *muršid*, considering it a meritorious act. The *muršid*, on his part, is not expected to make public the amount given to him by a Zikri and usually do not check what is given to him. The common belief is that the money given to a *muršid* is money given to God (*hudāy rāh-ā* "on the path of God"), so the relationship is between the believer and God and not between the *muršid* and the believer.

illustrate the relationship, *muršids* often give the example of a thirsty cow that runs a great distance to reach the water in a riverbed to quench its thirst. After drinking its fill, it urinates in the water it had been craving so much. Zikris say a *murīd* should long to see his/her *muršid* so that his visits should give them spiritual consolation and if a *muršid* visits his *murīd* frequently then the *murīd* will get tired of his *muršid*. Moreover, a *murīd* should feel spiritual nearness with his *muršid* even when the latter is physically far from him, and consolation only through the physical presence shows imperfection of the *murīd*'s faith.

All adult *murīds* of a touring *muršid* visit him and greet him by kissing his right hand. The *muršid* rewards the *murīds* by reading religious formulas and blessing the believers. Those with the financial means provide meals to the *muršid*, and all the men of a village are generally invited to consume the food with him.⁷¹ As it is believed that any *muršid* transmits blessing to the faithful, hundreds of people may join the meal.⁷² If the *muršid* is accompanied by his wife or children, women eat with them. The *muršid* usually stays as the guest of the most well-to-do of his *murīds* in a particular village, and he may change his ancestral *murīd* if one lacks the means to host him.

Muršids descend from four different *sayyid* lines:⁷³ Isazai and Musazai, who are descendants of Isa and Musa, two sons of Chirag Hudadat (see section 2);⁷⁴ Kiyayazai, descendants of Haji Ghazi Lari, a companion of the Mahdi who joined him at Lar in Fars province; and the Shey family, descendants of Mir Abdullah Jangi, another companion of the Mahdi, who claim descent from Shaikh Junaid Baghdadi (cf. ABDUL GHANI BALOCH 1996:22-23).

71 Usually men consume food in the company of the *muršid*, and women and children take their share after the food has been prepared by the women collectively.

72 This practice has become too costly in recent times, and one sometime hears hosts of a visiting *muršid* complaining about the practice. In the past people would only join their family *muršids* at their meals while now an entire village may join a visiting *muršid* at lunch and dinner, I was told.

73 It should be noted that Zikri *muršids* are strictly endogamous.

74 Cf. PASTNER 1984:305, ABDUL GHANI BALOCH 1996:23. According to ABDUL GHANI BALOCH 1996:23 they are called "Husaini Sayyid". Ahmad Abdullah Shahzada, a Sunni scholar, explains that Zikri *sayyids* are also called *mawlāi* (from the term *mawlā* "master, lord"), denoting the descendants of Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad. He maintains that the term *mawlā* was given to Ali by the Prophet himself and was later added as an epithet to his name. He opines that Ali's descendants inherit this epithet. Among them, Chirag Hudadat especially inherited this title (SHAHZADA n.d.:18), so Zikri *muršids* are also called *mawlāi* (SHAHZADA n.d.:18; cf. also ABDUL GHANI BALOCH 1996:23).

The authority of *tawba* rests with the eldest member of a *muršid* family. Only after his death do his sons inherit the authority to convey *tawba* to sons and daughters of the *murīds* of their forefathers. When a *muršid* dies, his *murīds* are divided among his sons, though the choice rests with the parents as to which of the *muršid*'s sons to take as their family *muršid*, or whether to divide the children equally among the sons of the deceased *muršid*. In case a *muršid* dies with no male offspring, his *murīds* pass on to a male member of his immediate family.

There are many moral obligations and behavioural expectations from a *muršid*. He is expected to behave as an example, and detach himself from worldly comforts and pleasures, devoting himself to the service of the community and the faith.⁷⁵ In the past the *muršid* would not possess any property or business, or get involved in politics, but now some of them have bought property or engaged in politics, especially at the time of elections.

Non-local informants have put forth a number of inaccuracies about the relations between Zikris and their *muršids*, and successive writers have passed these on without verifying them.⁷⁶ For example, QAMARUDDIN's claim (1985:228-29) that mullahs (by which he means *muršids*) issue "letters of admission to paradise" at death has no truth in it.⁷⁷ Similarly, Zikri marriage practices have been misrepresented. Contrary to some reports (e.g. QAMARUDDIN 1985:228), it is usually not the *muršid* who reads the nuptial formula (the *nikāh*) for a wedding couple but rather any mullah (cf. fn. 63) of Sunni or Zikri faith. QAMARUDDIN (1985:228) also says if the *muršid* is not readily available then the bridegroom or a close relative takes an empty waterskin to the *muršid* and he fills it with his breath. This waterskin is then taken to the bride and the *muršid*'s breath is emitted into the bride's face, after which the marriage ceremony is considered to be complete.

75 Again, this is parallel to Sufism, where a *muršid* "must conform to the strict rules of the order and be well prepared and of impeccable moral conduct; otherwise (...) his status as a *murshid* shall be considered *haram*: forbidden" (REXHEB 1984:160).

76 In some cases, this is due to lack of direct knowledge and misinformation provided by anti-Zikri elements; in others, it is due to hostility towards the Zikris. For instance, AHMED 1987:49 reproduces a number of biased and discriminatory remarks about the Zikris before he admits that "previous rumours regarding sexual malpractices were unfounded according to all my reports" (AHMED 1987:58).

77 Similarly, there is no truth in QAMARUDDIN's report (1985:228-229) that "the *Dhikris* fall at the feet of their *mullah* on his entering a house, and they do not rise until he has not touched their backs (...) absolution from all sins is also obtainable from a *mullah* for a little hard cash".

There is not a grain of truth in this bizarre scenario: *muršids* may live hundreds of kilometres away from their *murīds* and visit them only once or twice a year, while weddings take place all year round, so it is not logically possible that the *muršids* themselves perform a wedding service or send their breath to formalise all weddings taking place among the Zikris.

5. Koh-i Murad: a *ziyārat*, not a *ḥajj*

Zikris consider Koh-i Murad to be the epicentre of the earth. *Kōh-i murād* means "hill of wishes", i.e. the "hill where wishes [*murād* in Arabic and Balochi] are fulfilled" (ABDUL GHANI BALOCH 1996:74).⁷⁸ Sometimes it is also referred to as the *maqām-i mahmūd* "highly praised place" (MAZAR UMRANI n.d.:40ff.). The sanctity of this place derives from the Mahdi's residence there for a period of 10 years (ABDUL GHANI BALOCH 1996:73). This has been described in the Zikri poetic tradition, e.g. by the 18th century poet Shaikh Mohammad Durfishan: *qarīb-i dō panj sāl dar kēč būd / bi kū-i⁷⁹ xudā xalq-rā rah nimūd* "He was in Kech for 10 years / He showed the people the direction of the path to God" (cited in DURRAZAI 2003:59; ABDUL GHANI BALOCH 1996:73), and by another 18th century Zikri poet, Brahem Kashani: *čō dā'ī dar ānjā iqāmat namūd / qadam dar qayām ō sar andar sajjūd / pas az xatm-i dah sāl dar kēč būd / basē sāl kūē balāgat rabūd* ("When the Dā'ī [the Mahdi] stayed at that place [at Koh-i Murad] / Steps firm and head bowed in prostration / After the end of ten years in Kech [he departed] / All these years he spent in preaching").⁸⁰

The Zikris have an emotional attachment to the whole region of Kech, where the Koh-i Murad is situated. They consider it "flower of the earth" (*gul-i zamīn*).⁸¹ Their religious songs use words of praise such as *turbō gul u ganjābād* ("[Praise be to]

78 The interpretation "mountain of Murad" (referring to Mulla Murad) reported by some non-local scholars (cf. REDAELLI 1997:110; AHMED 2002:391; AL-BUSHAHRI 1999:475) is not correct.

79 ABDUL GHANI BALOCH 1996:73 gives *bi sū-i*, which I believe is the correct version.

80 *Itihād-i nawjāwānān-i Zikrī* II:3; cf. ABDUL GHANI BALOCH 1996:75.

81 Cf. BALOCH 1996:229; BRESEEG 2004:76. MITHA KHAN MARI (1991:146-147) translates the word *kēč* as "populated and beautiful city". Historically the main town of Kech was on the northern side of the River Kech (*kēč kawr*) where the ruins of the *Mīrī* fort are still to be found. In about 1870 a devastating flood destroyed the town (*Baluchistan Through the Ages* 1979/I:554) so the population moved to the other side of the river where the present town of Turbat is situated. Zikri sources hold that the name Turbat (lit. "grave") refers to the fact that the successor of the Mahdi, Sayyid Abdul Karim (died AH 5-2-1035/6-11-1625 AD) was buried there (MAZAR UMRANI n.d.:16).

Turbat, the flower[y land] and Ganjabad");⁸² or: *ḡī turbat u kōh-i murād* ("Praise-worthy are Turbat and the Koh-i Murad"). There are several places in Turbat and the surrounding areas where, according to popular belief, the Zikri Mahdi prayed and preached and later ascetics of the faith spent time in *čillag* (the 40 days⁸³ during which religious people retire to isolated cells and engage in fasting and worship).

Although the Zikris emphasise that Koh-i Murad is a *ziyārat* and not a substitute for the *ḡajj* at Mecca, the veneration they attach to it has led to the widespread misconception among Sunni clerics and others that Zikris consider it a *ḡajj*, which would mean that they elevate it to the same rank as Mecca.⁸⁴ Zikris categorically deny this,⁸⁵ and consider it a malicious attempt to misrepresent their faith in order to paint them as deviating from Islam. Zikris believe Koh-i Murad is a place where God listens to their prayers, supplications and penitence (RAGAM 2000:111).⁸⁶ They often call it *ziyārat šarīf* ("noble *ziyārat*"), and those who return from it are called *ziyāratī*.⁸⁷ Similarly, groups going to perform *ziyārat* at Koh-i Murad are called *ziyāratī pirka*.

82 Ganjabad (lit. "place of treasures") was the old name of Turbat and the adjacent villages, see the previous note (HETU RAM 1987:646).

83 *Čilla(g)* is also "a regular institution in the Sufi path (derived, as Hujwiri says, from the 40-day fast of Moses, when he hoped for a vision from God, as related in Sūra 7:138)" (SCHIMMEL 1975:103).

84 Cf. BDGS VII:118-19; AHMED 1987:54-55; AL-BUSHAHRI 1999:475.

85 Note that the Mahdi himself is said to have undertaken the pilgrimage (*ḡajj*) to Mecca (ABDUL GHANI BALOCH 1996:57, 59, 149).

86 In 1994 Zikri and Sunni religious scholars gathered at the office of the Commissioner Makran, at Turbat, and the former signed a paper declaring under oath that they do not consider the Koh-i Murad a *ḡajj* but only a *ziyārat* (ABDUL GHANI BALOCH 1996:48). The representatives of the All Pakistan Muslim Zikri Anjuman have, on several occasions, convened press conferences expressing the same standpoint (ABDUL GHANI BALOCH 1996:149). The use of the word *ziyārat* (Arabic "pious visitation, pilgrimage to a holy place, tomb or shrine", MERI 2002:524) to refer to holy places, many of them associated with holy persons and their legends, e.g. springs, wells, caves, mountains, etc. (MERI 2002:524) is very common throughout the Islamic world. The fact that high esteem does not make a *ziyārat* a *ḡajj* is shown by parallels from some Shiite traditions which attribute much merit to the performance of *ziyārat* to Karbala on the day of 'Arafa and equate it to "one thousand pilgrimages, one thousand lesser pilgrimages and one thousand military expeditions with the prophet" (MERI 2002:525). Other beliefs are that for a pilgrim to Ali's shrine at Najaf "the Most High will register merit equal to one hundred thousand martyrdoms, and his sins of the past and the present will be forgiven" (DONALDSON 1933:64; quoted in HOLLISTER 1953:52).

87 Among the Zikris, as elsewhere, *ḡajj*, or *ḡajj-i akbar*, is reserved for the pilgrimage to Mecca (ABDUL GHANI BALOCH 1996:73), and *ḡajjī* is used for someone who has performed pilgrimage to Mecca (see also DURRAZAI 2005:118ff. for the importance of *ziyārat šarīf*, i.e., Koh-i Murad in the Zikri faith).

Zikris setting out to the *ziyārat* – whether on foot, or riding on animals, buses or trucks – sing special songs. The soloist sings: *pirkaī mardān Lāhūtā* ("a group of men [is marching] from Lahut [a shrine north of Karachi]"),⁸⁸ and the *jawābīs* respond: *dēm pa čirāgēn ziyārattā* ("...forward to the enlightened⁸⁹ *ziyārat*"). Another such song says: *Lārī mardān ča Lār kāhant* ("people of Lar are coming from Lar"),⁹⁰ while the chorus replies with the same response as in the other song. Similarly, there is a specific song when they leave Koh-i Murad after the *ziyārat*. The soloist sings: *ē sālā mā ziyārat ku(t)* ("this year we performed *ziyārat*"), and the chorus rejoins: *dēmāy sālā yā kismat* ("next year [as well], if fate [will allow us]"). Another popular *čawgān* says: *tunnīg-un par hudāyā* ("I am thirsty for God"), and the *jawābīs* rejoin: *sitkā bandān ziyārattā* ("we make our intention for the *ziyārat*, i.e., in order to pray God at that sacred place with the hope that God listens to our prayers").

Annually Zikris congregate at Koh-i Murad in the thousands on the 27th of Ramadan, and in lesser numbers on the 15th of Sha'ban, the 9th day of *‘Īd al-Adhā*, and on the 14th of any lunar month when it occurs on a Friday, making Turbat the centre of their faith and religious activities.⁹¹ In the past many would go on foot to perform the *ziyārat* – the only exceptions being the aged, children, pregnant women and new mothers, who would ride on animals. People might spend months reaching Turbat, and they would fast during all this period, eating only a few dates for breakfast and drinking some water.⁹² They would reach Koh-i Murad on the evening of 26th Ramadan, at about sunset, visit the hilltop (*muhr*), perform *ziyārat*, and leave on the 28th of

88 It is said that in the distant past *ziyāratīs* started from Lahut and were joined by other people on the way until they all reached Koh-i Murad (for Lahut see *BDGS* VIII:38). The shrine of Lahut, also called *Lāhūt-i Lāmakān*, is frequented at all seasons by Sunnis and Zikris, as well as by Hindus.

89 For *čirāg*, see fn. 31, 89.

90 This refers to Lar in Larestan in the Fars province of Iran. It has a great importance in the Zikri religion because the Mahdi is believed to have stayed there for a period of six years before coming to Kech. A number of his companions joined him at this place. Zikri traditions mark it as the westernmost border of the faith (cf. fn. 3).

91 AHMED (1987:55) reports 30,000 to 40,000 Zikris gathered at the Koh-i Murad for their annual *ziyārat* in 1985. Their number seems to have increased in recent years as people have more financial resources and transportation facilities to participate in the congregation even from distant areas. In fact, newspapers reporting the 2006 congregation put the number at 30,000 to 50,000 (daily *Āsāp*, Quetta-Turbat, 08-10-06; daily *Tawār*, Mastung, 20-10-06).

92 Many Zikris still go on foot to perform *ziyārat*. Depending on the distance, they start their journey weeks before the 27th of Ramadan to arrive on time (see daily *Intixāb* 08-10-06, for the news of a group of *ziyāratīs* who started their journey on foot from Ormara on the 12th of Ramadān).

Ramadan. In modern time, due to the availability of transportation, most *ziyāratīs* leave for their hometowns on the 27th, and by the evening of 27th, the site is almost deserted.

Once at the Koh-i Murad, they would abstain from worldly pleasures and would spend all the time in meditation and prayer.⁹³ *Ziyāratīs* were to kill their worldly desires (*naḥs*). Most people would eat or drink as little as possible to avoid the need to go to the toilet as the place is considered too sacred to be polluted. Many would fast during the day and limit their nightly food to a few dates and a little water, taken at the time of breaking the fast. The only exception was *hayrāt*, which was consumed for its heavenly merits (*ṣawāb*). More devout persons would start fasting when they started their journey to the *ziyārat* on foot.⁹⁴ Many also observed three limitations: *kamm bwār*, *kamm bwasp*, *kamm habar bikan* ("eat less, sleep less,⁹⁵ talk less"), because Koh-i Murad is a place for prayers (*zigr*), repentance and supplication (*arz u piryād*), and not a place to relax and enjoy the pleasures of life. Women would not put on colourful clothes or jewellery during their stay, a practice no longer strictly observed, as lamented by DURRAZAI 2005:123-124.⁹⁶

Recent developments

In the past there were no tensions between Zikris and Sunnis, and the *ziyārat* contributed considerably to the local economy. People from all parts of Balochistan and as far as Karachi and interior Sindh came in large numbers once or twice a year to

93 Akbar Ahmed observes that "they stay up all night reciting verses [of the Quran] and words in praise of God" (AHMED 1987:55).

94 In the words of my informants: *āhān tēwagēn saparā rōčag dāštag, dāpbōjā dānagē dānagē ārag jātāg, u guṭṭē guṭṭē āp wārtāg* "they used to keep fast during the whole journey; would chew a few pieces of dates and drink a few sips of water at the breakfast" (interviews in Turbat, Sept. 2005).

95 Many of my informants stress *ziyāratay sarā waspagay iḥzāt nēst* "sleeping is not permitted at the *ziyārat*" (discussions at the Ziyarat Committee's office at Koh-i Murad, Sept. 2005). Needless to say, this might be true for aged and observing people but not for women and children. In modern times, because of the availability of transport facilities, entire families go to the *ziyārat* and stay there for one to three days. Those travelling longer distances, such as from Karachi and interior Sindh, may stay longer. Many erect tents or stay in rooms or sheds they have already built for their families so that women and children may spend a relatively comfortable time.

96 Some informants commented disapprovingly that in modern times both men and women put on their best clothes for the *ziyārat* to show their socio-economic status. Others lamented that in modern times many people come to meet their relatives and friends living in different places, and not solely to perform the *ziyārat* (interviews at Koh-i Murad, Sept. 2005).

perform *ziyārat*. On the return journey, they visited the town centre of Turbat and bought local goods, especially dates and other agricultural products.⁹⁷ Since the 1980s, however, the situation has completely changed, and Zikri *ziyāratīs* are now barred from entering the town of Turbat. This change started when Sunni fundamentalism began to grow during the anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan, which brought the influx of millions of dollars into Balochistan for the construction of mosques and *madrasas* (AHMED 1987:48). This resulted in an Islamic radicalisation of Baloch society, which was traditionally secular in politics and liberal in religious matters.

At the same time, radical Sunni religious parties, patronized by the state machinery of Pakistan and financed by Arab sheikhdoms, have grown rapidly in the last few decades, especially the Jamiat Ulama-e Islam (JUI) of Maulana Fazl ul-Rahman.⁹⁸ Firstly they targeted Zikris, whom they consider non-Islamic, and secondly they aimed at Baloch nationalist political parties and organizations, in particular the Baloch Students Organization, a secular students' organization. The nationalists in turn oppose the Islamization of Baloch society and depict Islamic fundamentalism as the antithesis of Baloch nationalism (see AHMED 1987:48).

The Sunni parties have penetrated all sectors of Baloch society at the expense of Baloch nationalist forces. This has posed serious threats to the peaceful coexistence between the Sunni and non-Sunni Baloch populations, and Zikris remain the prime target of Sunni religious parties in Balochistan.⁹⁹ For instance, Sunni religious parties have been

97 An interesting anecdote is that a caravan of camels once passed a group performing *zikr*. A man from among the performers got up and shouted at someone in the caravan to buy some sacks of dates for him from Turbat market. Then he rejoined the congregation until the end of the *zikr*. At the conclusion, some people rebuked him for speaking during the *zikr*. He is said to have answered: *zigr amidēn, kār wān rawt* ("*zikr* [is always] here but the caravan leaves"). This has now become a proverbial saying among the Baloch in Makran meaning that "God can wait but the time not".

98 Shaikh Rashid Ahmad, a federal minister of Pakistan, emphasised in an interview to a local TV channel (AVT Khaibar's programme "One to One") that Maulana Fazl ul-Rahman "was a product of Pakistan's secret services" who is patronized by them (reproduced here from the Urdu daily *Inti-xāb*, Habb, 19-10-06). For a historical perspective on the alliance between the military and the Sunni clerics and an analysis of how they have drawn sustenance from one another, see REHMAN n.d.

99 One example of such tensions is an incident which took place on November 10, 2006, during the session of Balochistan's Provincial Assembly at Quetta. A provincial minister, Maulana Dur Mohammad Parkani of the JUI Fazl ul-Rahman group, made mocking remarks against Mr Jan Mahmud Bulaidai, an assembly member from Makran belonging to the National Party. Mr Bulaidai in turn said that the Maulana was receiving a percentage in bribe from government contracts, and if this was not true, he should take an oath on the Quran to prove his innocence. The Maulana reacted

organizing annual gatherings of the *Maǧlis-i taḥaffuẓ-i xatm-i nabūwat* ("Association for the Protection of the End of Prophethood") at Turbat at the time when the Zikris come for their annual *ziyārat* (cf. MASTIKHAN 1990:48; AHMED 1987:55ff.). Such gatherings attract thousands of non-local Sunni clergymen, mostly from among the Punjabi and Pathan jihadists but also hundreds from Iranian Balochistan. They make calls to bar Zikris from visiting the Koh-i Murad, to demolish their holy places, and even call for a general massacre (*qatl-i ʿāmm*) of all the Zikris (AHMED 1987:55). With increasing tension, the local administration often imposes laws to restrict Zikris within the boundary wall surrounding the *ziyārat* area and accompanies them in militia convoys to and from the Koh-i Murad. The situation seems to worsen year after year as Sunni fundamentalism is very much on the rise and there is little hope of returning to the past situation when the two communities lived peacefully and harmoniously side by side.

In recent years, the US-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the rhetoric against Islamic radicalism have diverted the energies of the fundamentalist parties away from the Zikris. This is likely to be a temporary lull, however, because the distance between the Zikri and the Sunni Baloch population is widening day by day in interior Balochistan due to the fundamentalist propaganda campaigns against Zikris. The only counterforce to Sunni fundamentalism on this front is the Baloch nationalists, who see Zikrism as an integral part of Baloch national identity and, as such, worthy to be protected.

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harshly, calling Mr Bulaidai a Zikri with no right to talk of the Quran. On this, Mr Bulaidai and others from the opposition benches staged a walkout and returned to continue the assembly only when the Maulana took his words back after lengthy discussions (see the daily *Tawār*, Mastung, 11-11-06; daily *Intixāb*, Habb, 11-11-06 for the news). It should be noted that Mr Bulaidai's father converted to Sunni Islam in the early 1980s along with his immediate family members as a result of constant threats received from Sunni groups there. Unlike many other families who left the area, he opted for conversion.

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